



**Queensland University of Technology**  
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

McNamara, Judith, Kift, Sally M., Butler, Des, Field, Rachael M., Brown, Catherine, & Gamble, Natalie (2012) Work-integrated learning as a component of the capstone experience in undergraduate law. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 13(1), pp. 1-12.

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/49615/>

**© Copyright 2012 New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education**

Access to published manuscripts is free and available only in electronic form. Published articles are provided in the form of PDF files and may be used freely so long appropriate references to the manuscript and the Journal are made.

**Notice:** *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

# Work-integrated learning as a component of the capstone experience in undergraduate law<sup>1</sup>

JUDITH MCNAMARA<sup>2</sup>

*Queensland University of Technology, Australia.*

SALLY KIFT

*Queensland University of Technology, Australia.*

DES BUTLER

*Queensland University of Technology, Australia.*

RACHAEL FIELD

*Queensland University of Technology, Australia.*

CATHERINE BROWN

*Queensland University of Technology, Australia.*

NATALIE GAMBLE

*Queensland University of Technology, Australia.*

---

There is currently little guidance in the Australian literature in relation to how to design an effective capstone experience. As a result, universities often fail to provide students with a genuine culminating experience in the final year of their degree. This paper will consider the key objectives of capstone experiences – closure and transition – and will examine how these objectives can be met by a work-integrated learning (WIL) experience. This paper presents an argument for the inclusion of WIL as a component of a capstone experience. WIL is consistent with capstone objectives in focusing on the transition to professional practice. However, the [ability-capacity](#) of WIL to meet all of the objectives of capstones may be limited. The paper posits that while WIL should be considered as a potential component of a capstone experience, educators should ensure that WIL is not equated with a capstone experience unless it is carefully designed to ensure that all [of](#) the objectives of capstones are met. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 2011, 12(1), 1-18)

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, capstone, final year experience, transition, closure

---

## INTRODUCTION

The authors are currently investigating an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded research Project ('the Project') which aims to improve capstone experiences in law through curriculum renewal. The Project seeks to achieve curriculum renewal for legal education through the articulation of a set of interconnected curriculum design principles for the final year and the design of a transferable model for an effective final year program. This paper will report on an aspect of the Project relating to the role of work-integrated learning (WIL) as a component of a capstone experience. Conceptions of WIL and capstone experiences are currently high on the Australian university learning and teaching agenda.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the 2010 ACEN conference.

<sup>2</sup> Communicating author: 617 31381255, [j2mcnamara@qut.edu.au](mailto:j2mcnamara@qut.edu.au)

However, despite the obvious synergies between the two learning experiences, the relationship between capstone and WIL and the 'joined-up' role these learning experiences might play in facilitating student transition from tertiary study to the world of work and professional practice have not been clearly articulated.

This paper will report on the Project's examination of the relationship between capstone and WIL and their potential interconnectedness. First, the paper provides an overview of the Project's findings in identifying organising principles for the design of capstone experiences. These research- and evidence-based findings have synthesised the contemporary capstone literature in [the](#) light of iterative input from the Project's reference group and following feedback from final year student and recent graduate focus groups. Second, the paper will provide a brief overview of selected literature in relation to WIL. Third, the role of WIL as a component of a capstone experience is explored. Given the emphasis of WIL on the integration of discipline knowledge with the workplace and work practice, in particular the development of employability skills, this paper will suggest that the role of WIL in capstone experiences is primarily to aid the transition to professional practice by assisting students to develop transferable skills, to gain an awareness of the culture of their discipline and to provide career direction. It is the authors' contention that it is unrealistic to expect that WIL opportunities will be routinely capable of delivering on all of the desirable capstone objectives; rather the whole of the final year of the degree should be considered for its contribution in this regard. The paper concludes that the better view is that WIL should be viewed as one component of a larger, more holistic, capstone *'experience'*, rather than a stand-alone capstone experience in its own right.

#### CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

A capstone is "a crowning course [subject] or experience coming at the end of a sequence of courses [subjects] with the specific objective of *integrating* a body of relatively fragmented knowledge into a unified whole" (Durel, 1993, p. 223). It is an opportunity for final year students to both look back on their undergraduate study in an effort to make sense of what they have accomplished, and to look forward to a professional existence where they can build on that foundation. It is during the capstone experience that students complete the transition from their primarily *'student'* identity to embrace their beginning professional identity (Durel, 1993). Given the role of capstones in facilitating [program](#) integration and student transition to professional practice, there is a clear link between capstone experiences and WIL.

In the process of conceptualising an organising framework to guide informed practice around capstone curriculum design, the Project has identified six capstone curriculum principles relating to transition, closure, diversity, engagement, assessment and evaluation (the draft Principles are included as Attachment A). Of these principles, the two principal objectives of capstones that can be drawn from the various definitions in the literature are closure and transition ([Durel, 1993](#); Heinemann, 1997; Gardner, 1999; ~~Durel, 1993~~). Gardner (~~1999~~) asserts that the most important elements of a final year experience are: the opportunity to reflect on undergraduate learning; integration and closure; and a holistic approach to the transition to life beyond university. Reflective practice is one means of enabling students to achieve closure and transition to their post-university life.

Closure is not clearly defined in the literature and most commentators use the terms *closure* and *integration* interchangeably (for example see Heineman, 1997; Gardner, 1999). In our

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

view, *closure* is a wider term which refers to a culminating experience that assists students to attain a sense of what it means to be a graduate of the particular discipline. *Integration* is one means by which that sense of closure can be achieved. Integration refers to the “objective of integrating a body of relatively fragmented knowledge into a unified whole” (Durel, 1993, p. 223). It includes, but extends beyond, the integration of theory with practice. It allows students “to pull together all the ideas presented in different courses [subjects] and construct some sort of integrated, meaningful whole” (Heinemann, 1997). Heinemann (1997) identifies several benefits of integration. First, it enables students to make sense of the confusion caused by differences between subjects and academics (for example, in the use of terminology). Second, it is the means by which students understand what it means to be a graduate in a particular discipline. Third, only integrated knowledge is meaningful and useful and can be applied in unfamiliar situations. Finally, integration can achieve intellectual consolidation and allows for competence testing, an issue of increasing importance in the contemporary assurance of learning environment.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

It has been argued that, in order to achieve closure, capstones should concentrate on the integration of existing knowledge and skills rather than the acquisition of new content (Bailey, Oliver & Townsend, 2007). While the importance of integration is acknowledged, in the authors’ view a capstone experience should do more than achieve the integration of existing knowledge and skills. Capstones should –also allow students to experience the complexity of the discipline in the context of their emerging professional identity, providing an opportunity to synthesise their undergraduate learning (Hovorka, 2009). Conceptualised in this way, a capstone is a culminating experience in which students are asked to integrate, apply, critique and extend the knowledge and skills they have acquired over the course of their undergraduate study (Wagenaar, 1993; Hoffman, 2003; Myers & Richmond, 1998; Hoffman, 2003; Wagenaar, 1993). Capstone subjects are likely to be the only opportunities within the degree programme that traverse the breadth of the curriculum, adding depth and meaning to concepts and ideas previously introduced, and encouraging students to use this synthesised knowledge in authentic professional contexts.

In addition to such integration, synthesis and extension of programme learning, the culminating nature of the capstone experience is also reflected in the critical facilitation of student awareness of what it means to be a graduate of the discipline, and an emerging sense of professional identity; an identity which then continues to grow in their post university life (Durel, 1993; Hovorka, 2009). Well-designed capstone courses aid this transition by contributing markedly to the development of a relevant professional identity (Jervis & Hartley, 2005; Bailey et al., 2007), particularly by enabling students to make connections between their learning and authentic professional contexts. While the literature clearly recognises the important role of capstones in this development, it is less clear on how this should be achieved. WIL approaches - such as practicums, internships, fieldwork, placements and the like, that enable student engagement with the professional identity of their discipline – are most often referred to as effective mechanisms in this regard.

Comment [A1]: Not in ref list

However, while providing retrospective closure (in the broad sense described above) is critical, effective capstones also support and facilitate transition (Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998) and bridge the gap between university studies and new endeavours (Heinemann, 2007). Comparisons have been made between the transition from secondary to tertiary study and from tertiary education to professional practice (Jervis & Hartley, 2005; Wells, Kift & Field, 2008). In this regard, universities have been encouraged to provide students with

specific support during the final year to assist them to navigate the changes associated with university completion and to develop an enabling, forward-looking focus in anticipation of life post-university; “[to] cope with impending change, become aware of how all aspects of their lives have contributed to their development as learners, and find connections between their academic experience and future plans” (Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998). It is essential to a positive ‘transition out’ that graduates be equipped with the ability to deal successfully with the uncertainty, complexity and change that will attend a lifetime of modern professional practice and will demand continuous engagement with new learning inevitably beyond the scope of their prior university studies.

Relevantly then, as the Project’s draft Final Year Curriculum Principles (Attachment A) seek to explicate, capstone experiences also support transition by assisting students to consolidate the development of their self-management skills (for example, lifelong learning skills, resilience, self-confidence and self-efficacy). The acquisition of lifelong learning skills has been shown to smooth the transition from university to professional practice (Fairchild & Taylor, 2000), and to enhance motivation, initiative and creativity in the workplace. Reflective practice has been recognised as an essential aspect of lifelong learning (Brockbank & McGill, 1998), and personal self reflection is essential to the successful transition to professional practice (Hovorka, 2010, 2009). Reflection fosters both personal and professional development (Olsen, Weber & Trimble, 2002), and contributes to the acquisition and refinement of higher order cognitive skills, including critical thinking (Forde, 2006). Students need to be provided with opportunities to consider and reflect on what they have learned, and to contemplate the ways in which their knowledge could be used in a professional context (Dunlap, 2005).

Comment [A2]: Not in ref list

A further vital component of any positive transition to the world of work is support for students to manage their career planning and development processes, and the provision of opportunities for them to consider how their own knowledge and skills might interact with different professional skill sets (Gardner, 1999). The literature suggests that universities should provide students with career development learning, together with information on graduate destinations, thereby enabling students to consider the career paths of those who went before them (Myers & Richmond, 1998) and empower their own career self-management. [Smith, Brooks, Lichtenberg, McIlveen, Torjul and Tyler Smith et al.](#) (2009, p.10) assert that:

Comment [A3]: Name all authors at first citation.

...career development learning enhances student engagement; the student experience; student transitions; and contributes to workplace productivity. It is valuable to provide a wide spectrum of workplace experiences to facilitate student participation in work related learning, hence curriculum reform and design across the sector (including learning tools and resources) should enhance this wider access to career development learning and work related learning.

The objectives of both closure and transition are advanced when capstones enable students to enhance their professional skills and competencies so they can be applied in complex environments post-graduation. A range of generic employability skills (as a subset of graduate attributes) have been identified as crucial outcomes of the capstone experience, including interpersonal and communication skills, critical thinking, decision-making, ethical and philosophical appreciation, and leadership (Aitkin & Neer, 1992, as cited in Heinemann, 1997, p. 6). In readiness for contemporary workplaces, adaptability and flexibility also warrant inclusion, as the nature of modern workplace practice sees vast changes occurring in

~~considerably~~ remarkably short periods of time (Heinemann, 1997). Successful capstones involve the demonstration of higher cognitive skills, including higher order knowledge and critical analysis (Durel, 1993), and equip students with the building blocks, the links and the functions that span the divide between student and critical professional.

The capstone literature ~~evidences~~ displays some tension between the sometimes opposing objectives of closure and transition (Heinemann, ~~2007~~1997). This is exacerbated by the tendency of most commentators to focus on capstone subjects rather than a holistic capstone experience which may take place across a number of subjects of study. Existing capstone subjects generally focus on either closure (and integration) or transition (Heinemann, ~~2007~~1997), rather than seeking to balance the two objectives. A further complication is that much of the literature in the United States refers to capstones in or across majors rather than to capstones for an entire degree. Arguably, a capstone for a major may more readily achieve closure with the focus being on bringing together the various elements of the area of study, whereas a capstone for a whole degree may more readily focus on transition.

Comment [A4]: Not in ref list

Comment [A5]: Not in ref list

Before moving on to a consideration and comparison of WIL in the capstone context, specific consideration of the central tenet of reflective practice and its contribution to capstone closure and transition is warranted. As the brief overview above has demonstrated, reflective practice is a central theoretical foundation for the design and delivery of capstone experiences (Kift, Field & Wells, 2008) primarily because it is a malleable device that enables students to achieve closure on their program learning and transition to post-university life from various perspectives, including: learner capabilities and performance, career, workplace, personal development, professional identity and whole-of-program achievement. For example, embedded reflective learning assists students to integrate what they have learned with existing knowledge (Dunlap, 2005) and to consider critically their prior learning (Baker, 1997) and the ways in which their knowledge and skills may be used in professional contexts (Dunlap, 2005). Integrative learning in its broadest sense – temporally across the program of study, personally and professionally, and as between university identity and global citizenry – is encouraged by reflection and interpretation (Fernandez, 2006). As discussed above, integral to lifelong learning, reflection fosters both personal and professional development (Olsen, Weber & Trimble, 2002), and contributes to the acquisition and refinement of higher order cognitive skills, including critical thinking (Forde, 2006). In the context of program completion, a reflective component also serves to highlight a student's sense of accomplishment.

Conceptualised in this way, the role of reflective practice in effective capstone design is desirably broad and pervasive, facilitating both retrospective and forward-~~s~~-looking learning and, through personal reflection, enabling the potential for personal transformation, the promotion of self awareness and the acquisition of a sense of citizenship (Hovorka, ~~2010~~2009). It is suggested that these objectives are more expansive than those traditionally harnessed in the WIL environment, where the ~~understandable~~-focus is understandably on reflective learning aligned to the context of the (authentic) workplace and the practice of work. This is not to deny the transformative potential of reflection in the WIL context, but rather to observe that its rationale and purpose are necessarily different, and quite intentionally so, in that environment.

Comment [A6]: Not in ref list

The broad and complex objectives of effective capstone experiences that have been described in this section may be achieved in a variety of ways; for example, by way of an integrated suite of final year subjects; by modules placed across the final year program, which might

be further supported by ‘cornerstone’ experiences at critical points throughout the program to assure student preparedness for capstone engagement; or by individual subjects of study. WIL is obviously an increasingly common example of a capstone approach. Other capstone experiences frequently referred to in the literature include: research projects; case studies; capstone events such as presentations, exhibitions, conferences and performances; project or problem based learning opportunities; and simulations, virtual learning environments and competitions. WIL as an example of a capstone experience will now be discussed.

#### WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

In recent years, there has been a growing demand for graduates to have enhanced work experience and to be ‘work ready’. It has been argued that the integration of work and study while at university is a means of improving work readiness (Universities Australia, 2008) and of developing graduate attributes and employability skills (Bates, Bates & Bates, 2007). As a result, WIL has proliferated in Australian universities, many of which have included “WIL goals in institutional strategic directions and the provision of internal structures and support” (Patrick, Peach, Pocknee, Webb, Fletcher & Pretto, 2008, p. 3).

There have been many definitions of WIL provided by the literature (Abeysekera, 2006). WIL is widely used to describe situations where students spend time in a workplace setting as part of learning. The Australian Minister for Employment Participation, the Hon Brendan O'Connor Government has conceptualised WIL as having the “immeasurable value of integrating real work experience into academic programs” and further stated that “[e]ffective Work-Integrated Learning is the key to developing a person’s job-readiness” (O’Connor, 2008, p. 1). The 2008 ALTC funded WIL Scoping Study defined WIL as: “An umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum” (Patrick et al., 2008, p. iv). More particularly, WIL is described as “a class of university programs that bring together universities and work organisations to create new learning opportunities in workplaces” (Boud, Solomon & Symes, 2001, p. 4). The key characteristics of WIL can be said to be the centrality of an authentic experience, the integration of university learning and practice, collaboration between universities, industry and students and the award of academic credit (Abeysekera, 2006). WIL encompasses, but is not limited to, work placements; it also includes other authentic experiences that have a link to industry. Specific examples of WIL include work placements, projects, practicums, clinics, simulations, internships and service learning. Increasingly, these types of experiences are acknowledged as providing rich learning opportunities to prepare students for the future of “daunting complexity” and “relentless change” (LEAP Report, 2007, 2009, p. 13). In addition to the benefits to student learning, many universities also see WIL as an important component of a broader institutional strategy to encourage community or civic engagement, while industry connections provide partnerships on which to found research linkages and collaborations (Patrick et al., 2008, p. 18).

The pedagogical foundations for WIL lie in theories of constructivism and transformative learning. The theory of constructivism suggests that “learners make meanings by contextualising the content within the learning environment in the workplace” (Delahaye & Choy 2007, p. 3). According to Choy, “The workplace provides an authentic learning site to transform and construct vocationally and socially meaningful knowledge and skills” (Choy 2009, p. 266). Critical self reflection is central to transformative learning theory: individuals

Comment [A7]: reference

Comment [A8]: not in ref list

Comment [A9]:



make significant personal and social changes by critically reflecting on their assumptions and implementing resulting action plans (Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1998). WIL provides a context for students to make new meaning and to integrate theory and practice (Weisz & Smith, 2005; Boud et al., Solomon & Symes, 2001).

In seeking to identify the synergies between WIL and capstone experiences, it is evident that the key concepts of “integrat[ion] of theory and practice and eas[ing]... transition into the workforce” (Patrick et al., p. 10), principally enabled through reflection and engagement with professional identity, are common features. More recently, attention is now being devoted to the potential for WIL to contribute intentionally to career development learning (Smith, Brooks, Lichtenberg, Mellveen, Torjul & Tyler et al., 2009), the extent to which this currently occurs being “unclear” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 9). Less frequently mentioned in the WIL context is the attention directed to the student’s sense of completion as a graduate of the discipline, their emerging global citizenry, the pervasiveness of reflective learning (as broadly conceived in the previous section) and the more expansive view of integrative learning that includes, but clearly reaches beyond, the integration of theory with practice. Empowering graduates with the skills they need to cope with endemic change in their future working lives as they transition from student to beginning professional (Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998) is an additional capstone outcome that is rarely reported in the WIL environment.

#### RELATIONSHIP OF WIL TO CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

Many of the objectives of capstones identified by the Project can be achieved through a carefully designed WIL subject, while providing experiential learning opportunities is increasingly seen as an element of capstones (Kerka, 2001; Andreasen & Wu, 1999). As has been identified, capstones and WIL share many common objectives: to contribute to the development of a relevant professional identity; to prepare students for the demands that will be placed on them when they enter the world of work (Bailey et al., 2007); and to bridge the theory-practice divide (Bailey et al., 2007). WIL can play an important role in the capstone experience in assisting to achieve these objectives. Pedagogical investigation across a range of disciplines suggests that capstone experiences may include WIL in a large variety of forms, including internships, research projects, study abroad programs, theses, specialist seminars, and field trips (Hovorka, 2009). This is because, ideally, capstones should seek to highlight the real-world relevance of what has been learned in the classroom, and should provide students with the opportunity to apply knowledge and skills in real or work-like contexts, drawing on the experiences of those already practicing in the field (Reid & Miller, 1997). WIL is an obvious and transformative means of achieving this real world relevance.

WIL is also recognised as contributing to student engagement which links to “desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking” (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006, p. 23). The AUSSE (Australasian Survey of Student Engagement), includes a “Work-Integrated Learning” engagement scale (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2010), which acknowledges the role of WIL as supporting high quality learning and student engagement (Patrick et al., 2008, pp. 20-21).

Despite their common objectives, it is interesting to observe the disconnected ways in which WIL and capstone approaches have been developed and are considered. Taking the AUSSE (ACER, 2010) as an example, the “Work-Integrated Learning” engagement scale, which is unique to the AUSSE and does not appear in the United States National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) on which it is based, is accompanied by the descriptor “Integration of



employment-focused work experiences into study” and contains the following items: (ACER, 2010, p. 69)

Blended academic learning with workplace experience;

Improved knowledge and skills that will contribute to your employability;

Developed communication skills relevant to your discipline;

Explored how to apply your learning in the workforce;

Industry placement or work experience; and

Acquiring [sic] job-related or work-related knowledge and skills. (ACER, 2010, p. 69)

In the AUSSE, the item encapsulating capstone engagement is included under the “Enriching Educational Experiences” engagement scale with the accompanying descriptor “Students’ participation in broadening educational activities” (ACER, 2010, p. 68). The items under that scale include, relevantly include (ACER, 2010, p. 68)

Practicum, internship, fieldwork or clinical placement;

Community service or volunteer work ...;

Culminating final-year experience; and

Independent study or self-designed major. (ACER, 2010, p. 68)

While this disjunct might be explicable on the basis of the AUSSE survey’s adaption from the American to the Australasian context, the distinction drawn between “culminating experience” (or capstone) and the *means* by which it might be enacted, under either of the two engagement scales, is instructive.

Interestingly also, it does not seem that the two notions – WIL and capstone – are necessarily considered to be interchangeable by the relatively well-established WIL community. In 2008, the national WIL Scoping Study (Patrick et al., 2008) recognised and reported on “the plethora of terms used to describe WIL” (2008, p. 51) and collected “a range of terms and definitions ...in use across the practice of WIL” which reflect the “breadth and depth” of that practice and also “a range of institutional purposes” (2008, p. 9). Interestingly, ‘*capstone*’ was not a term that was used by any stakeholder as recorded in that Report; indeed neither of the words ‘*capstone*’ or ‘*culminating*’ appears anywhere in the 2008 WIL Report.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

#### HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF WIL FOR THE CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

While the descriptors might not currently be aligned and the relationship between WIL and capstone demands further theorising, there is no denying the potential of WIL to contribute to an effective and positive capstone experience. In terms of transition, WIL is generally viewed as a means of developing graduate attributes and employability skills. During WIL experiences, students are provided with mentoring and training which strengthens their transferable skills and abilities, solidifies their sense of work ethic and enhances confidence in their job performance (Kane, Healy and Henson, 1992). Skills often include enhanced time management, corporate-specific communication skills, collaborative workplace skills, critical thinking, self-discipline, and an ability to initiate business related activities (Wesley & Bickle, 2005). Moreover, while it might not embed career development learning, WIL

Comment [A10]: not in ref list

frequently provides direction for career choices (Patrick et al., 2008, p. 21), and often increases the job prospects of students upon graduation (Tovey, 2001).

Comment [A11]: not in ref list

Under the broad objective of achieving closure, WIL does provide students with the opportunity to gain a “cultural awareness of their discipline” while experiencing the world of work and affords “students ... the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding in authentic and meaningful contexts” (Patrick et al., 2008, p. 13). There is some evidence that WIL has the potential to be effective in assisting students to integrate the broad sweep of knowledge and skills attained over the course of their degree. A student quoted in the WIL Report “summed up her learning as *taking all of the skills learned through uni and using it all in this [WIL] course – it’s all wrapped up in this [WIL] course*” (Patrick et al., 2008, p. 21). However, we suggest that WIL will usually be limited in its capacity to integrate fully a degree’s knowledge, skills and attributes. Particularly, the disparateness of dynamic workplaces, the extraordinary diversity of WIL opportunities, their iterations and learning objectives would seem to militate against assurance of this type of integrative learning for many WIL experiences. For example, in a placement situation where the experiential component of WIL is not controlled by the university, it may be particularly difficult to ensure there is an application of the integrated knowledge skills and capabilities that have been learnt throughout the degree. According to Ram (2008, p. 137): “It is difficult to find a single ... placement in which a student majoring in computer based information systems could use all of the areas of information and communications technology (ICT) prescribed in a tertiary program of study-” (p. 137).

Comment [A12]: not in ref list

For the reasons discussed, despite the parallels between the objectives of WIL and capstones, WIL alone will rarely assure all of the desirable elements of a capstone experience. It is the authors’ view that the role of capstone goes beyond the objectives of WIL and that the better view is that WIL, particularly in relation to preparation for the transition to professional practice (Orrell, 2004), might be one component of a capstone experience; how large a component will depend upon the precise nature of the WIL concerned. Rather than relying on a single WIL subject as providing the entire capstone experience, the final year as a whole should be designed in a coherent way in order to achieve the overall capstone objectives.

## CONCLUSION

The literature reveals that the two principal objectives of an effective capstone experience are transition and closure and that reflective practice is one of the central theoretical foundations by which these objectives may be achieved. Experiential learning is also increasingly seen as an essential element of capstones. This paper has argued that some of the objectives of capstones identified by the Project may be achieved through a carefully designed WIL subject: particularly, WIL focuses on the transition to professional practice, seeks to integrate theory with practice and provides opportunities for reflection. However, the ~~ability-capacity~~ of WIL to provide closure on a student’s whole-of-program education may be limited where the experiential component of WIL depends on a work experience which is not controlled by the university. Given the overlap between the objectives of capstones and WIL, it has been suggested that WIL should be considered as a potential and valuable component of the capstone experience. However, educators would be well advised to take care in equating WIL with capstone unless all desirable capstone objectives are met. This paper has advocated a broader, more holistic, approach to intentional capstone design for a positive final year experience that is delivered to all students; one that embraces, but does not rely on, WIL in isolation.

## REFERENCES

Abeysekera, I. (2006). Issues relating to designing a work-integrated learning program in an undergraduate accounting degree program and its implications for the curriculum. *Asia Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 7(1), 7-15.

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). (2010). *Doing more for learning: Enhancing engagement and outcomes*. Australasian Student Engagement Report. Melbourne, Australia: ACER. Retrieved August 21, 2011, from <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/ausse/reports>

Andreasen, R. J., & Wu, C. H. (1999). Study abroad program as an experiential capstone course: A proposed model. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 6(2), 69-78.

Bailey, J., Oliver, D., & Townsend, K. (2007). Transition to practitioner: Redesigning a third year course for undergraduate business students. *Journal of Management and Organisation*, 13(1), 65-80.

Baker, M. P. (1997). *What is English? Developing a senior 'capstone' course for the English major*. Radford, [Country: United States](#): Radford University.

Bates, A., Bates, M., & Bates, L. (2007). Preparing students for the professional workplace: [Who](#) who has responsibility for what? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 8(2), 121-129.

Boud, D., Solomon, N., & Symes, C. (2001). New practices for new times. In D. Boud & N. Solomon, (Eds.), *Work-based learning: A new higher education?* [City: Buckingham](#), United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Brockbank, A., & McGill, I. (1998). *Facilitating reflective learning in higher education*. Buckingham, [Country: United Kingdom](#): SRHE/Open University Press.

Bruner, J. (1960) *The Process of Education*, [Cambridge, Massachusetts, State](#): Harvard University Press, [Cambridge](#). [not cited in text]

Bruner, J. (1969) *Toward a Theory of Instruction*, [Cambridge, Massachusetts, State](#): Harvard University Press, [Cambridge](#). [not cited in text]

Carini, R. M., Kuh, G. D., & Klein, S. P. (2006). Student engagement and student learning: Testing the Linkages. *Research in Higher Education*, Vol. 47, No. 1, February 2006, 47(1), 1-32.

Choy, S. (2009). Transformational learning in the workplace. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 7(1), 65-84.

Delahaye, B. L., & Choy, S. C. (2007). [Using work-integrated learning for management development: Some key elements for success](#). Paper presented at the 21st ANZAM Conference. Retrieved August 21, 2011 from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/10794/>

Dunlap, J. C. (2005). Problem-based learning and self-efficacy: How a capstone course prepares students for a profession. *Educational Technology, Research and Development*, 53(1), 65-85.

Durel, R. J. (1993). The capstone course: A rite of passage. *Teaching Sociology*, 21(3), 223-225.

Fairchild, G. F., & Taylor, T. G. (2000). [Using business simulations and issues debates to facilitate synthesis in agribusiness capstone courses](#). Paper presented at the [Western Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meetings](#), June 29 - July 1 2000, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Fernandez, N. P. (2006). Integration, reflection, interpretation: [Realizing the goals of a general education capstone course](#). *About Campus*, 11(2), 23-26.

Forde, P. (2006). [Evaluation: The capstone experience](#). Paper presented at the [Enhancing Student Learning: 2006 Evaluations and Assessment Conference](#).

Gardner, J. N. (1999). The senior year experience. *About Campus*, 4(1), 5-11.

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: French (Haiti)

Formatted: Font: Not Italic, Highlight

Formatted: Font: Not Italic, Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Gardner, J. N. & Van der Veer, G. (1998). *The senior year experience. Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc, San Francisco.

General Teaching Council for England, *Research of the Month: Enquiry based learning, cognitive acceleration and the spiral curriculum: Jerome Bruner's constructivist view of teaching and learning*, (May 2006). Retrieved June 6, 2010, from [http://www.gtce.org.uk/research/romtopics/rom\\_teachingandlearning/bruner\\_may06/?abutton=2](http://www.gtce.org.uk/research/romtopics/rom_teachingandlearning/bruner_may06/?abutton=2) [not cited in text]

Gibala, D., & Stuhldreher, W. (2001). The internship as a capstone experience: The bridge from academia to practice. *Link*, 15(2). [not cited in text]

Heinemann, R. L. (1997). The senior capstone, dome or spire? Paper presented at the 83rd Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association.

Heinemann, 2007

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Comment [A13]: Not in ref list

Hoffman, G. J. (2003). Before the cap and gown, the capstone: How much can you learn in four years? *Resource*, November 2003, 10(2), 22-24. Retrieved May 21, 2011, from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa5409/is\\_200311/ai\\_n21341218/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5409/is_200311/ai_n21341218/)

Hovorka, A. J. (2009). A capstone course of 'geographic' ideas. *Journal of Geography*, 108(6), 252-258.

Hovorka, 2010

Comment [A14]: Not in ref list

Jervis, K. J., & Hartley, C. A. (2005). Learning to design and teach an accounting capstone. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 20(4), 311-339.

Kane, S. T., Healy, C. C., & Henson, J. (1992). College students and their part-time jobs: Job congruency, satisfaction, and quality. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 29, 138-144.

Kerka, S. (2001). Capstone experiences in career and technical education. Practice application brief No. 16: For full text: <http://www.ericacve.org/fulltext.asp>.

Kift, S., Field, Rachael R., & Wells, Ian I. (2008). Promoting sustainable professional futures for law graduates through curriculum renewal in legal education: A final year experience (FYE2). *eLaw Journal*, 15, 145-158.

LEAP Report, 2007.

LEAP Report (The National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise (The LEAP Report). (2009). *College Learning for the New Global Century*. Washington, DC: publisher?Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective transformation. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 28(2), 100-110.

Mezirow, J. (1998). On critical reflection. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(3), 185.

Myers, S. A., & Richmond, V. P. (1998). Developing the capstone course in communication: Nine essential questions. *The Southern Communication Journal*, 64(1), 59-64.

O'Connor, B. (2008, October 1). Work-Integrated Learning (WIL): Transforming futures practice ... pedagogy ... partnership. Paper presented at the *World Association for Cooperative Education (WACE) Asia Pacific Conference, Sydney*. Retrieved August 21, 2011, from

Formatted: Font: Italic

<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/OConnor/Releases/WorkIntegratedLearningWILTransformingFuturesPracticePedagogyPartnership.htm>

Olsen, R., Weber, D., & Trimble, F. (2002). Cornerstones and capstones: A case study on the value of a holistic core in the discipline of communication studies. *Communication Education*, 51(1), 65-80.

Orrell, J. (2004). Work-integrated learning programmes: Management and educational quality. *Proceedings of the Australian Universities Quality Forum 2004*. Retrieved August 21, 2011, from <https://tls.vu.edu.au/vucollege/LiWC/resources/Orrell.pdf>

Patrick, C.-J., Peach, D., Pocknee, C., Webb, F., Fletcher, M., & Pretto, G. (2008). *The WIL [Work-Integrated Learning] Report: A national scoping study*. Brisbane, Queensland. Retrieved August 21, 2011, from [www.altc.edu.au/system/files/grants\\_project\\_wil\\_finalreport\\_jan09.pdf](http://www.altc.edu.au/system/files/grants_project_wil_finalreport_jan09.pdf)

Formatted: Font: Italic

~~Ram (2008)~~, Ram, S. (2008). Industry based learning and variable standards in workplace assessments. *Asia Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education* 9(2), 129-139.

Reid, M., & Miller, W. (1997). Bridging theory and administrative practice: The role of a capstone course in P.A. programs. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 20(10), 1513-1527.

Sargent, S. D., Pennington, P., & Sitton, S. (2003). Developing leadership skills through capstone experiences. Paper presented at the "Frontiers of Leadership: People, Places and Programs" the Association of Leadership Educators International Conference. Retrieved August 21, 2011, from <http://www.leadershipeducators.org/Resources/Documents/Conferences/Anchorage/sargent1.pdf> [not cited in text]

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Smith, M., Brooks, S., Lichtenberg, A., McIlveen, P., Torjul, P., & Tyler, J. (2009). *Career development learning: Maximising the contribution of work-integrated learning to the student experience*. [Australian Learning and Teaching Council] Final Project Report June 2009. Wollongong, Australia: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

~~The National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise (The LEAP Report). (2009). College Learning for the New Global Century. Washington.~~

Tovey, J. (2001). Building Connections between Industry and University: Implementing an Internship Program at a Regional University. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 10(2), 225-239. (Tovey, 2001).

Trail, W. R., & Underwood, W. D. (1996). The decline of professional legal training and a proposal for its revitalization in professional law schools. *Baylor Law Review*, 48, 201-246. [not cited in text]

Universities Australia. (2008). A national internship scheme : ~~enhancing~~ Enhancing the skills and work-readiness of Australian university graduates. Deakin, ACT: ~~Deakin ACT~~: Universities Australia, 2008.

Wagenaar, T. C. (1993). The capstone course. *Teaching Sociology*, 21(3), 209-214.

Weisz, M., & Smith, S. (2005). Critical changes for successful cooperative education, in higher education in a changing world. Paper presented at the 28th HERDSA Annual Conference.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Wells, I., Kift, S., & Field, R. (2008). FYE2: Recognising synergies between the first and final year experiences in legal education. Paper presented at the 11th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

~~(Wesley & Bickle, 2005)~~ Wesley, S. C., & Bickle, M. C. (2005). Examination of a paradigm for preparing undergraduates for a career in the retailing industries: Mentors, curriculum, and an internship. *College Student Journal*, 39(4), 680-691.

## ATTACHMENT A

### DRAFT FINAL YEAR CURRICULUM DESIGN PRINCIPLES

#### 1. Transition

An effective capstone experience supports transition by:

- Drawing on students' self-management and other legal skills to deal successfully with uncertainty, complexity and change;
- Assisting students in beginning to develop a sense of professional identity; and
- Supporting students to manage their career planning and development.

#### 2. Closure

An effective capstone experience provides closure by:

- Supporting students to integrate, synthesise and extend their learning in the program; and
- Enabling students to attain a sense of completion and an understanding of what it means to be a law graduate and a global citizen.

#### 3. Diversity

An effective capstone experience responds to diversity by:

- Enhancing students' capacity to engage with diversity in professional contexts; and
- Being inclusive of all students.

#### 4. Engagement

An effective capstone experience promotes student engagement by:

- Requiring students to assume active roles, to apply their learning in realistic and unfamiliar contexts and to take responsibility for their own work; and
- Providing opportunities for reflection to enable students to make connections between their learning and professional contexts and to assist the development of their professional identity.

#### 5. Assessment

An effective capstone assessment recognises the culminating nature of the experience by:

- Aligning assessment practice to the capstone principles; and
- Requiring students to make appropriate use of feedback and to reflect on their own capabilities and performance.

#### 6. Evaluation

An effective capstone experience:

- Should be regularly evaluated to ensure its relevance, coherence and alignment with the program;
- Contributes to the whole of program evaluation; and

- Contributes to the demonstration of student attainment of the discipline learning outcomes.